

Blood of Me

by Courtney

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Distribution: If you post my fics already then yes. If you don't and you want to then just ask.

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Part 1

Here I stand sad and free And I can't cry, I can't see What I've done
Oh, god, what have I done? Don't you know I'm numb, no I can't feel a
thing And all cause it's all smiles and business these days And I'm
indifferent to the loss And I think that there's a soul somewhere
that's leading me around I wonder if she knows which way is down?

--Evaporated by Ben Folds Five

December 23, 2000 Albuquerque, New Mexico

She looked down at the tiny bundle in her arms. The baby squirmed and started to cry, as if she sensed the pain in her mother's touch. It was their last moment together . . . their goodbye.

"I'm sorry sweet girl. I love you," she said softly to the tiny child that she loved more than life. She bent her head to kiss the smooth skin of her daughter's head. "I'm doing this because I love you . . . please know that I love you," she whispered to the baby. "I love you, Tessa," she said as tears spilled down her cheeks and soaked into the pale pink blanket that swaddled the child.

The social worker came over to gently lift the baby from her arms. She didn't say anything to the young mother. Nothing that she could say would take away this pain. It was the worst thing she'd ever felt in her life. But it was the right thing. It had to be the right thing.

She watched as the woman took the child and left the room. All she could do was watch as her baby was taken away . . . forever. And, as the door closed behind the women, all the young mother could do was slump to the floor and begin to cry. She felt like she'd never stop crying.

* * * * *

November 21, 2016 Chicago, Illinois

Tess Anderson stood in front of the mirror and brushing out her long, chestnut-colored hair. It fell just above her waist and was, in her own opinion, her best asset. Of course, her mother would tell her that she was wrong, that she was beautiful in so many ways. Her mother was always saying things like that.

She looked into the bathroom mirror and examined the young woman that stared back at her. Besides the long, wavy hair that crowned her head, she also had deep brown eyes, the color of dark chocolate. Her olive skin covered high cheekbones and a long, slender nose. Her lips were full, hiding straight, white teeth that were courtesy of years of orthodonture.

She was beautiful. Any passing observer would find Tess Anderson striking. Many a stranger had stopped to stare as she walked down the streets of Chicago. With her dark good looks and stunning figure, Tess was the subject of many high school locker room fantasies. Still, she didn't feel beautiful; she didn't feel special . . . she

just felt different. She'd always felt different.

She sighed as she set aside her hairbrush and turned from the mirror. It was her sixteenth birthday and her parents were taking her to their annual dinner at her favorite French restaurant. They'd be leaving soon and she needed to find her suede pumps. She went back into her bedroom and knelt in front of her overflowing closet to dig for the missing shoes.

"Teresa! Are you almost ready?" she heard her mother call from downstairs. She stood up, found shoes in hand, and called back, "Coming mom." Though to everyone else she was Tess, to her mother she was always Teresa, which was her full name. Her mom never, ever called her Tess. It always seemed odd that she didn't when even her father preferred to call her by her nickname, but it wasn't like it was a big deal. Just one of those things, she supposed. She slid into her shoes and checked her hair in the mirror one last time before grabbing her purse and heading downstairs. * * * * *

"Tess, we have something to talk to you about," her father said, his face devoid of his usual goofy grin. As conservative as her mother was, that's how completely unreserved her father was. He always had a joke for everyone and it was rare to see him without that smile. It made her blood run cold to see him in such a serious mood.

"What is it, daddy?" she asked anxiously. She looked over at her mother who sat across the table with her hands in her lap and her lips pressed together. Something was wrong. "Tell me what's going on," Tess demanded.

"Honey, we've been trying to decide when to tell you this and it's just never seemed like the right time," he father began. "I guess we've waited too long, actually. In retrospect, you deserved to know this a long time ago."

"Daddy, please just tell me," she said as she wrung her cloth napkin nervously in her hands. Their dinner had been pleasant enough, but she could tell the whole time that something had been on her parent's minds. There was something serious going on and she couldn't wait one more second to know what it was.

"Teresa, we want you to know that what we have to say doesn't change how we feel about you one bit. It's just something we think you should know," her mother told her.

She was losing her patience quickly. "Would you just tell me already!" she practically yelled.

Her father cast his eyes downward and cleared his throat. When he looked back at her, he looked more disheartened than she'd ever seen him. He looked more than that; he looked scared. It terrified her. He reached across the table and took her hand in his. "Sixteen years ago," he said, "God gave us a beautiful gift. A gift that we've cherished in our hearts for all this time; a gift we had waited so long for."

"Daddy . . ." she whispered as tears flooded her eyes. She still didn't know what was happening, but it couldn't be good, not from the sound of his voice.

"Your mother and I . . . we tried for a lot of years to have children. We wanted a family so very badly. But we could never . . . it just never happened. Then, one day, you came along. You were everything we'd ever wanted," he smiled, though it was not the smile she knew so well. This smile was sad, weak.

"What . . . what are you saying? What do you mean that I 'came along'? I don't understand any of this." Her tears were blurring her vision now, but she held them back with all her might.

"You're our daughter, Teresa . . . but you weren't born to us," her mother finally said. "We adopted you . . . when you were a month old. But you'll never be anything less than my precious baby, never." Her mother looked at her pleadingly, trying to persuade her little girl to please understand, please don't let this change things.

But it had to. This did change things. It changed everything. "I'm . . . I'm . . ." Her face went white and her mouth went dry. The tears she'd been holding back spilled down her cheeks as she looked in stunned disbelief at the people sitting across from her. They were her mom and dad; the only parents she had ever known . . . but suddenly the whole world was different. She wasn't who she'd always believed herself to be. She was different. She was a stranger . . . even to herself.

"I . . . I have to go," she said as she rose from the table. Her dad stood immediately and gently grabbed her arm.

"Tess, wait," he said softly.

"No daddy, I . . . I just need . . . I need to go," she finally said. He released her arm and she quickly fled the table, leaving them both in bewildered sadness. She hated to desert them, but she had no choice. She had to think . . . to clear her head. Her whole life was spinning out of focus and she needed to get a grip before she became too dizzy to stand.

As she left the restaurant and walked the familiar street outside, she was hit by a sudden burst of cold wind. She folded her arms over her chest and walked against the breeze, determined to think this out before she faced them again. She'd walk for a while, clear her head, and then she'd go home. Home wasn't far from the restaurant. Home was just around the corner.

She stopped dead in her tracks. Suddenly she realized that maybe home wasn't so close. She had no idea where home was anymore. She didn't even know *who* she was anymore. The only thing she was sure of at that moment was that she wasn't sure of anything . . . and she might never be again.

* * * * *

"You're shitting me!" Jake Carter said loudly to his best friend. They were sitting outside in the quad the day after Tess's birthday. The bell for homeroom hadn't rung yet and she had just been telling her lifelong friend about her parent's big revelation from the night before.

"No Carter, I'm not, and can you hold it down just a little please. I'd rather not broadcast this over the intercom just yet," Tess said

dryly.

"Adopted," mused the tall, lean blonde in a lower voice this time. "Wow." His clear blue eyes twinkled with surprise at this new information.

She looked over at the boy that she'd known her whole life. It was hard for her to imagine life without Carter. He had always just been there, like her own personal lighthouse in the middle of a raging storm. He made things better. He always knew what to say. Still, she had no idea how he'd manage to make this situation any better.

"I know, it's crazy," she said with a shake of her head. "I mean, how did I not know? I look nothing like them for God's sake! I mean, my mother is blond, my dad's a redhead . . . how could I not have figured it out?"

"Tessie, no one actually thinks they are adopted unless they're mad at their parents . . . and you're *never* mad at your parents. You get along with them so well that it's scary."

"Yeah, that's because I've always trusted them. I've always believed that they were on my side . . ." She sighed and rubbed her face with her hands. "How can I ever believe them again, Carter?"

He sat next to her on the long wooden bench and placed a comforting arm across his friend's shoulders. "It'll be okay, Tessie," he assured her.

"I don't know how. It seems like nothing will ever be okay again," she replied.

"Why's that? What has changed, really? I mean, they have still been your parents for the past sixteen years. They still love you." He looked at Tess and she met his gaze. "Just because once upon a time someone else gave birth to you, that doesn't change the last sixteen years."

"I know, you're right," she said with a nod. "I just . . . now I'll always wonder, you know? I mean, who am I, really? Where do I come from? Why did my parents give me away? I feel like I'll never get those answers, Carter."

He looked down at the girl to his left and sighed. She was his very best friend, the girl he trusted more than anyone in the world. They'd been friends all of their lives . . . he hated to see her hurting. All he wanted to do was to make that hurt go away. But he didn't know how to conquer the pain in her eyes. He didn't have the answers she needed. He felt more helpless than he ever had.

"I tell you what, Tessie. You stick it for a while. Things will get better, you're just a little shocked right now and that's understandable. But, once your head is clear and this has had time to sink in, if you still want to look for those answers . . . well, I'll always be there to help you find them. Always."

She looked up at him and gave him a sad smile. Somehow, he always knew what to say. "Thanks Carter, I love you," she said.

He grinned and pulled his friend into a quick hug. "I love you, too,

Tessie," he replied. "Now come on, we don't want to miss the thrills of homeroom, now do we?"

"No," she giggled, "I guess not." And with that, they got up and walked to class.

* * * * *

December 10, 2019 New Haven, Connecticut

"Carter! Come on, let's go!" she called as she made her way briskly down the hall of her best friend's dorm. It was after eight o'clock in the morning and they had been scheduled to leave an hour before. But, as usual, Jake Carter was late.

"I'm coming, Tessie, I'm coming," he called as he swung out of the room at the far end of the hallway. His duffel bag was slung over his shoulder as he grinned at his friend.

"You're late," she stated.

"You're shocked?" he asked.

"Not really," she replied with a smirk.

"Good, then let's get this show on the road," he said and they started down the hall together.

When they'd reached the elevators, Jake turned to her. "So, you're sure about this, right?" he asked.

"Positive," she answered with an affirmative nod.

"Do your mom and dad know?"

"No, I just told them that we were going to visit some friends and that we'd be back in Chicago a few days before Christmas," she replied.

"You hate to lie to them," he pointed out.

"I know . . . but it had to be done. Think about it, could I really call them up and say, 'Mom, Dad, I'm not coming straight home for Christmas break because Carter and I are going to drive to New Mexico because, oh yeah, I forgot to tell you that I got my adoption records and found out where I was born. I'm going to look for my birth parents. No hard feelings, see you soon.'" Tess sighed as she finished her monologue. "Yeah, that would have went over like a lead balloon for sure," she told him.

"Well, maybe once you have the answers you want then you can tell them what you've found out," he offered.

"Yeah, maybe," she replied.

He could tell that this bugged her. Ever since she'd gotten those adoption records unsealed, she'd been adamant about seeking out her birth parents, but she still felt very protective over her mom and dad. She'd long since forgiven them for keeping this secret from her. She understood their need to wait. And the last thing in the world

she wanted to do now was to hurt them by making them think that she loved them any less. She could never stop loving them. It was just . . . she just needed to know. Especially now, especially with all the strange things that had been happening lately.

"I dreamed about this trip last night, Tessie," Carter said as they got off the elevator in the dorm lobby.

"I know," she replied.

"You know? What do you mean, you know?" he asked.

She stopped and turned back to her friend. What **did** she mean by that? She had a flash of something in her mind. It felt like a dream . . . but somehow it didn't feel like **her** dream. It felt like his. She could see Carter's dream as clearly as if . . . as if she'd been there herself.

"I . . . I just mean that I dreamed about it, too," she said quickly.

He gave her a weird look, but just nodded. Something was definitely going on with her, no doubt about it. "Okay, you ready?" he asked as they stood in the lobby with their bags in hand.

"Yep, let's hit the road," she replied. The two made their way outside into the cool, New England air and went over to Carter's red Jeep. After loading their stuff inside, the two friends got in the Jeep, Carter the driver and Tess the passenger.

"Okay, here we go, Tessie," he said as he started the engine and looked over at her. She gave him a smile and a little nod. He nodded in reply, then pulled the Jeep out of the parking lot and into the early morning traffic. They were off. They weren't sure what they'd find, but there was no doubt they would find something. Tess was sure of it.

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End
file.